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53 SEP
DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN



Cabullo
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image® COMICS PRESENTS: "THE RECKONING"



Dedicated to:
Michele Capullo

Spawn #52 Summary:

Unbeknownst to either of her parents, the shoelace that lies with Cyan in her bed attached to her soother, is the only physical clue to Terry's mysterious recovery from cancer. Meanwhile, Terry's nightmares continue to reflect Al's experiences and he can't risk sharing his fears with Wanda. In another dimension, Spawn enters Hell's fifth level where he is revered by the masses as a returning king and savior. Although he denies his status, he is forced into a confrontation with the Savage Dragon and they battle for the position of the Messiah. Spawn defeats the Savage Dragon and then draws the wrath of his worshippers by freeing him from their stoning. The dwellers of Hell turn on both of them and stone them to death... or do they?

FOR IMAGE COMICS
LARRY MARDER - Executive Director

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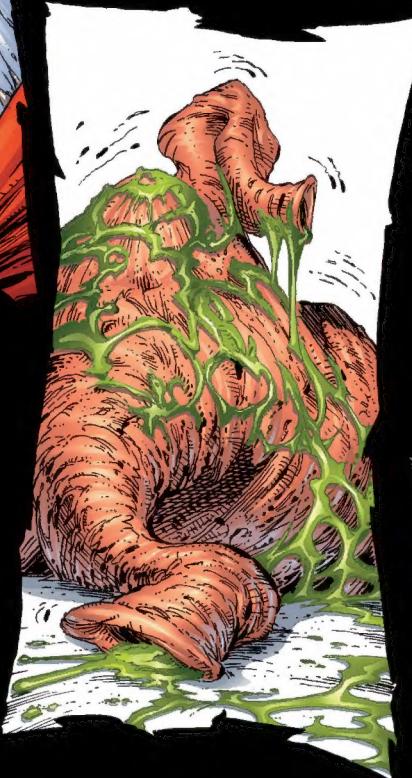




The ABYSS. A HARSH BLACKNESS SO DENSE NO LIGHT HAS EVER INTRUDED HERE. WHILE GOD WAS CREATING THE COSMOS, GIVING LIFE TO EVERY CORNER, HIS OMNISCIENT PRESENCE CAST A SHADOW. PLANTED THERE AS WELL WAS A SEED. IT GREW STEADILY IN THE COLD PALL OF THE ALMIGHTY.

THIS PATCH OF INFINITY, JUST TO THE LEFT OF THE PRECIOUS LIGHT, IS NOW A HARVEST GROUND FOR THE DIVINELY THWARTED SEED.

SEED WE NOW CALL SIN.



IT GERMINATES IN MEN OF WEAKNESS. LUST, GREED, AND THE OTHER DEADLY SINS TAKE ROOT IN THEM.

EMBEDDED NOW IN THIS DARK LOAM IS A MAN CONDEMNED BY HIS OWN ACTS UPON HUMANITY:

Lt. COLONEL AL SIMMONS.





HE'S BEEN HERE BEFORE. HIS CONSCIOUS MIND DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THE PLACE.

HIS SENSES DO.

IT HAPPENED IN A BLINK THE FIRST TIME... A SPLIT SECOND BETWEEN LIFE, DEATH AND UNDEATH.

RIGHT NOW, HE'S ONLY DISTANTLY AWARE OF THE STENCH OF MURDER...

...THE PIQUANT TASTE OF CHARRED FLESH...

...THE HOLLOW SOUND OF AN AGONIZED CRY.

IT'S ALL SO
FAMILIAR.

WHERE
HE WAS
CURSED.

IN EXCHANGE
FOR THAT UNHOLY
BLESSING HE PAID
THE ULTIMATE
PRICE: HE
RELENTLESSLY
RELINQUISHED
HIS SHARE OF
ETERNITY.

THIS IS
WHERE
HE DIED.

WHERE HE
MADE HIS
DEAL.

HE IS
RETURNED
NOW TO HIS
DEMONIC
BIRTHPLACE.



NO.

LEVEL NINE.

THE NIGHTMARISH
REALM THAT
VOMITED SPAWN
BACK TO LIFE.

WHOSE
RULER CRAVES
THAT WHICH
HE HIMSELF
WAS NOT
FURNISHED:
SOULS.

THEY ARE EITHER
GIVEN OVER AT DEATH
OR SURRENDERED
WILLINGLY BY THOSE
WHO REJECT GOD.
EACH SOUL HELPS TO
AMASS AN ARMY FIT
TO CONQUER THE
HEAVENS.

LORDING OVER IT ALL
IS THE DEVIL KNOWN
AS THE MALEBOGLIA.
HE WAITS OUT THE
SLOW CENTURIES UNTIL
THE BATTLE WITH GOD
IS DECLARED...

...UNTIL HIS
ARMY WILL
VANQUISH
THE LIGHT.

INTO EVERY
CORNER, THE
SHADOWS
WILL SEEP--

--DRIVING HOME
THE VICTORY
HIS GENERALS
HAVE WON.

AL SIMMONS
IS EXPECTED
TO ONE DAY
BECOME SUCH
A GENERAL...

... WHICH IS WHY SPAWN
IS NOW BEING PUT
THROUGH THE PACES.
MALEBOLGIA WISHES TO
SEE HIS POTENTIAL FIRST-
HAND...

... TO BEST GAUGE
WHETHER HE'LL
BE ABLE TO
GERMINATE THE
EVIL LIVING DEEP
WITHIN SIMMONS'
BEING.

UMPFF

SO THERE
MUST BE
TESTS.

MIXED
WITH CRUEL
IRONY.

you scream,
i scream.
we both scream
for ice cream

KINCAID!

HE'D KILLED HIM
ONCE BEFORE,
SPAWN HAD.*

BUT THIS IS HELL.
THIS IS NOW.

LOGIC ISN'T ACCORDED ANY FAVORS. INSTINCTIVELY, SPAWN KNOWS THIS. MORE IMPO-
RANTLY, HE ACCEPTS IT WITHOUT QUESTION.

ON EARTH, BILLY
KINCAID HAD FALLEN
TO THE LOWEST
POSSIBLE LEVEL
KNOWN TO MAN: A
MURDERING
PEDOPHILE.

STRIPPING CHILDREN
OF THEIR INNOCENCE...
AND SOCIETY OF ITS
CHILDREN.

THE HELLSPOWN
DISEMBOWELS HIM A
SECOND TIME WHILE
WISHING THAT KINCAID
WILL TRY TO GET UP SO
HE CAN GUT HIM AGAIN.

AND SO,
SPAWN HAS
PASSED
THIS TEST.



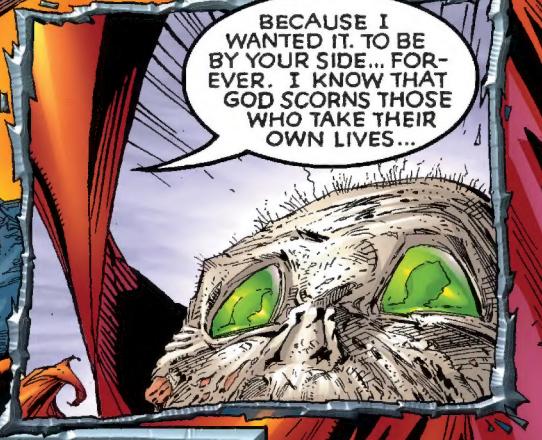
HE
DESERVED
IT. THANK
YOU, AL.

WANDA!!!?



I KNOW
WHAT YOU'RE
THINKING, BUT
IT REALLY
IS ME, SWEET-
HEART.

GOD,
HOW
CAN THIS
BE?!



BECAUSE I
WANTED IT. TO BE
BY YOUR SIDE... FOR
EVER. I KNOW THAT
GOD SCORNS THOSE
WHO TAKE THEIR
OWN LIVES...



...BUT
SUICIDE
WAS THE
ONLY CHOICE.
WE HAVE
TO BE
TOGETHER.

HE STARES IN
HER EYES.
THEY DON'T LIE.

HE CHERISHES THIS
ELUSIVE MOMENT
AS THEY EMBRACE.

THE WAIT HAS BEEN
SO VERY LONG.

I DIDN'T
MEAN FOR ANY
OF THIS TO
HAPPEN.



I KNOW
YOU DIDN'T,
AL. BUT I'M
HERE... WE'RE
HERE. ALL
OF US.

YOU WERE
ALWAYS TOO
MUCH MAN
FOR ONE
WOMAN.



NOW YOU
CAN HAVE
ME ANY WAY
YOU WANT.
FAITHFUL.
LUSTFUL.
ADORING.
IT
DOESN'T
MATTER WHAT
EMOTION YOU FEEL.
WE... I CAN FULFILL
YOU. 'TILL DEATH DO
US PART.' REMEM-
BER THAT, OUR
WEDDING VOW?

IT DOESN'T
HAVE TO END.
WE CAN
SATISFY
ALL YOUR
DESIRERS.



FOR ONE
BRIEF, FROZEN
MOMENT,
AL SIMMONS
BELIEVES HIS
TORMENT IS
FINALLY AT AN
END. EUPHORIA
REIGNS. HIS
CURSE HAS
BEEN LIFTED.

AS HE FALLS, IT STILL DOESN'T REGISTER. THIS IS A HOAX. A SHAM.

EXPLOITING THE WEAKNESS THAT FOREVER DAMNED HIM: HIS LOVE FOR HIS BEAUTIFUL WIFE.

A TEST.
SHE'S THE REASON HE NOW EXISTS, WHY HE HAD TO GO ON IN THIS NEW, WRETCHED FORM.

BUT NOW THEY'RE MOCKING HER AND WHAT SHE REPRESENTS.

HE WON'T LET THAT HAPPEN.

HE CLOSES HIS EYES AS SHE POUNCES...

...NOT WANTING TO WITNESS WHAT MUST NOW BE DONE.

IT'S NOT HER, HE KEEPS
TELLING HIMSELF.
IT'S NOT HER.

EVEN AS THE
SULPHURIC
AIR ECHOES
SICKENINGLY
WITH THE
SOUND OF
SNAPPING
BONES AND
CARTILAGE.

WHAT IS MOST
TORTUROUS IS
HEARING
WANDA'S SWEET
VOICE BEGGING
FOR MERCY.

HE CAN'T
BEAR IT.

LIKE SOME CRAZED,
PSYCHOTIC TARZAN HE
SCREAMS, DROWNING
OUT THE RITUAL
PLEASE!

AS ONE OF THE
CHANGELINGS
BRUSHES AGAINST
HIM, SPAWN GETS A
SENSE OF THEIR
TRUE FORM.

HIS GREEN EYES PEEL
OPEN, SPILLING
FORTH RAGING
ENERGY.

THEN, A
SINGLE WORD
IS WHISPERED.

ENOUGH.



GODDAMMIT,
I'VE SUFFERED
ENOUGH!

MALIBOLIA
WANTS A WAR.
HE'S GOT IT!
I DON'T GIVE
A CRAP
ANYMORE

SEND 'EM
PUPPETS - EVERY
LAST ONE OF
THEM I'LL
TAKE 'EM.

YOU WANT ME TO
BE LIKE YOU. FINE.
I'LL BE VICIOUS,
EVIL, SOULLESS...
AFTER I'VE RIPPED
YOUR THROAT OUT.

YOU
BASTARD.
THIS IS
GOING TO END.

A PATH OF SLAUGHTERED DEMONS TRAILS UP THE DARK MOUNTAINSIDE. HOW LONG IT TOOK HIM, HE DOESN'T CARE. HE'S WHERE HE WANTS TO BE AND NOTHING WAS ABLE TO PREVENT THAT.

THE BLOOD-CLOAKED WARRIOR HAS WON, PASSING YET ANOTHER TEST.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN, DEVIL!

CREATION MEETS CREATOR. THIS OFFICIALLY SETS THE SCENE.

Contain your
petty thoughts. SIMMONS
ignorance does not befit
you. You are a man. You were
my child. You were little
impulsive. You will grasp
only a fraction of
the truth about
yourself.

I DON'T CARE!

I don't do
sorcery about it.

BELIEVE
ME, I
INTEND
TO.

'CAUSE YOU
DON'T SCARE ME.
KNOW WHY? THERE'S
NOTHING LEFT FOR YOU
TO TAKE. I'M EMPTY.
DRAINED.

BUT I'LL NEVER
BE YOUR SLAVE.

NEVER!

SUDDENLY,
THE GROUND
SHIFTS--

--AS A SICKLY
CACKLE
REVERBERATES
THROUGH THE
CORRIDORS
OF HELL.

HAHAHA

Don't
delude your
self anymore
This for the love
for your comrade's
empty heart

You don't even
know what you're
fighting against or
why. How can
you even hope to
stay me when I'm
not there?

I'm
here
Or
am I

You're off
balance.
Sometimes exactly
what I want you
to do is challenging
your own sanity.
What's this
all about?

Well
I am
available
now.



Machines like
you are very
valuable to me
just like plant wiring.
You could have been
an instrument of
God's will. Instead,
you pimped
yourself.

allowing
others to
break your
mind with
your logic.

...the I
did. I did about
good or evil. Those
are concepts
reserved for man.
Very limited.

Just like
the
machines of
hell that
surrounds
you



It appears
as though
such dreams
believe it should
You would have
such narrow
impressions

One Devil
is not enough
Many Devils So
do their masters

Shadows
were created
in Hell. Their
terrible shapes
on Earth
and here enough
to Earth.



How can
you remain
like this? Much
is over there
at once?

I live
in all your
size. In all
shapes.



Evil is
the place
that makes
me crawl all
the heart
of man



That's how I feel you.
Because when I wanted
me Necronomicon, I felt that
you would always be always
there, my master.

You're right, I do feel
that way. But I will
watch over you grow
more... intelligent.

THEN TAKE
ME. MY SOUL,
WHATEVER THE HELL
YOU WANT--

--JUST
LEAVE MY
WIFE ALONE.
SHE'S NOT A
PART OF
THIS.

It's all right.
I'm here now.
It's all right, so
you're not alone
in this world.

YES, I
DO.
MY LOYALTY.

YOU DON'T
CONTROL THAT.
I'VE TAKEN YOUR
POWERS, YOUR
COSTUME, AND
WHATEVER IT IS I'VE
BECOME. BUT YOU
STILL DON'T
CONTROL ME.

YOU JUST OWN ME. THAT'S ALL. MY MIND'S STILL FREE, AND I REJECT ALL OF THIS. YOU'VE FAILED, MALEBOLGIA.

GOD'S LAUGHING AT YOU.

I never have
WORM! You're nothing!
You were called a worm
because I created it.
Because I let
you come back.

So the
Gods made your-
self think you're
free. That's what
comes
from
Believe
me I do
control you

Your
emotions are mine.
They're still Jason's.
Wyatt
He or I can't seem to
control your feelings.
You gave in.

If anyone
should be laughing,
it's me. I'm God's
face. I'm His grip
on our potential
elite. And I'm you
and he. I'm face
each other as
enemies.

That
will be
your
victory!

You are
becoming
exactly what I
intend. Your
skill is perfect.
Your
half-blinded vision
of these circumstances,
all out of your
control.

To do what my
Grim Reaper
My messenger

I have
seen
you
in
these
parts

The Village
of Milk

The Black
Heart of
Milk

Farm
of Milk

Slowly,
I've made
you over, in
my image--

--transforming
you into one of my
greatest warriors. So,
where there was failure
we now find grandeur.
Death now takes relentless
strides. Return, my
Hellspawn, to your
beginnings.

The Earth needs
you-- for, without
an agent of Death,
souls cannot be
harvested.

And my
army must
grow.

As with your loyalty,
I need your servitude.
In time, that will come.

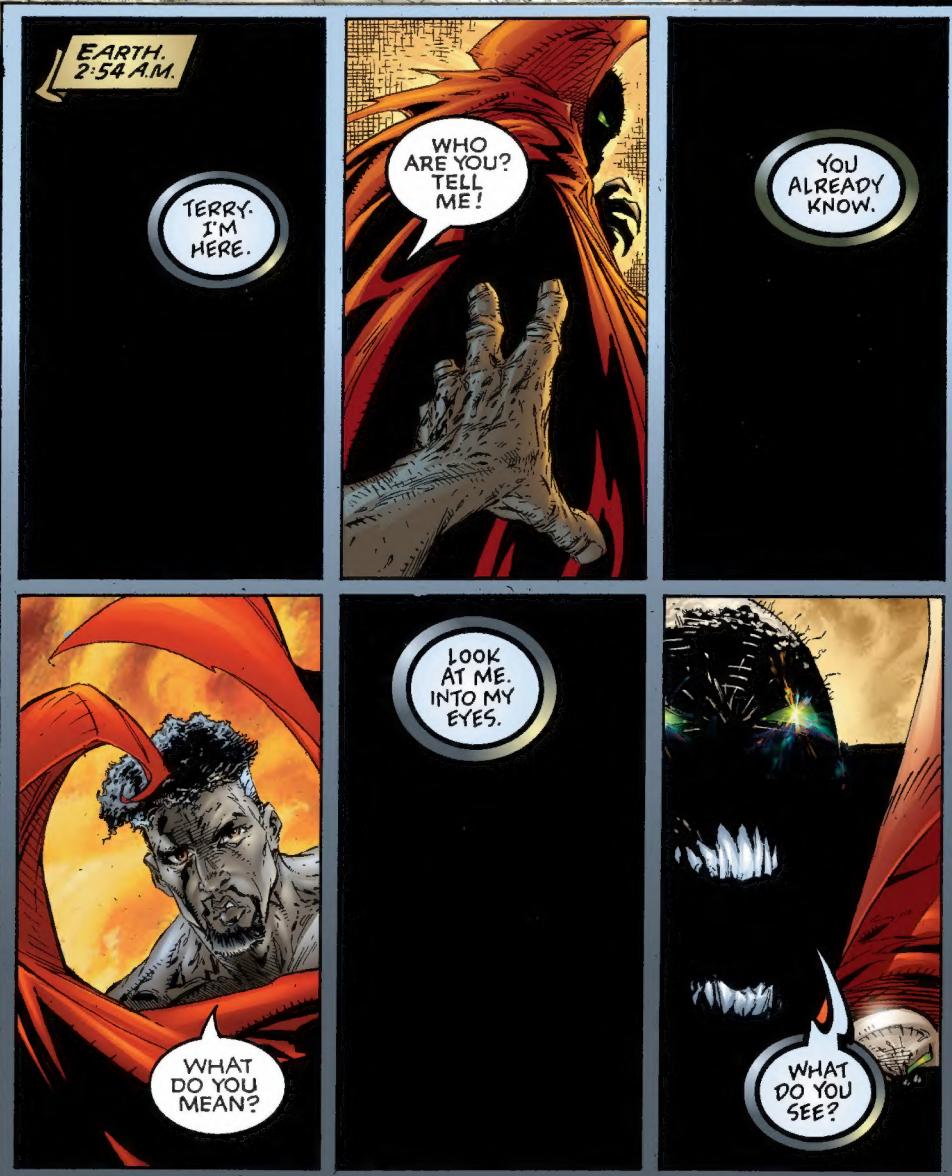
Let that time be now.

Be my executor.
Work for me and I
promise to leave your
wife untouched.

Pure.



"Now go. Stimulate corruption in your wake. Enter the minds of men. Disrupt their dreams and spread my gospel."





TERRY FITZGERALD
WILL SIT THERE,
SHAKING, UNTIL THE
SHADOWS WITHDRAW
FROM DAWN'S LIGHT.





EMPIRE